

SENATE BILL 1218

By Norris

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49,  
Chapter 4, Part 9, relative to creating the  
Tennessee reconnect grant.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 4, Part 9, is amended by  
adding the following language as a new section:

(a) This section shall be known and may be cited as the "Tennessee reconnect  
grant."

(b) Except for the definitions provided in this subsection (b), the definitions in §  
49-4-902 shall apply to this section:

(1) "Academic year" means three (3) consecutive semesters beginning  
with a fall semester and including the immediately following spring and summer  
semesters;

(2) "Eligible postsecondary institution" means a Tennessee public  
community college;

(3) "Eligible program of study" means a federal Title IV-eligible curriculum  
of courses leading to a certificate or associate degree; and

(4) "Gift aid" means financial aid received from the federal Pell grant, the  
Tennessee education lottery scholarship, or the Tennessee student assistance  
award.

(c) To be eligible for a Tennessee reconnect grant, a student must:

(1) Not have previously earned an associate or bachelor degree;

(2) Not be ineligible for the grant under § 49-4-904;

- (3) Have been a Tennessee resident as required by § 49-4-905(a)(1);
  - (4) Complete the FAFSA for each academic year in which the Tennessee reconnect grant is received in accordance with the schedule determined by TSAC;
  - (5) Be an independent student as determined by the FAFSA;
  - (6) Be admitted to an eligible postsecondary institution and enrolled in courses leading to completion of an eligible program of study; and
  - (7) Participate in a college success program through the Tennessee reconnect community initiative as created by the Tennessee higher education commission.
- (d) To continue to be eligible for a Tennessee reconnect grant, a student shall:
- (1) Enroll in classes at an eligible postsecondary institution that lead to completion of an eligible program of study;
  - (2) Maintain a minimum 2.0 grade point average at the end of each academic year as determined by the institution attended;
  - (3) Maintain continuous enrollment at an eligible postsecondary institution;
  - (4) Complete the renewal FAFSA each academic year as specified by TSAC;
  - (5) Attend at least as a part-time student; and
  - (6) Participate in a college success program through the Tennessee reconnect community initiative as created by the Tennessee higher education commission.
- (e) If a student ceases to be eligible for the Tennessee reconnect grant at any time, then the student shall not be eligible to regain the grant.
- (f)

(1) A student may receive a Tennessee reconnect grant under this section until the occurrence of the first of the following events:

(A) The student has attained a degree or certificate in an eligible program of study;

(B) The student has attempted the total number of semester hours necessary for completion of an eligible program of study as determined under Title IV satisfactory academic progress standards, inclusive of any postsecondary hours transferred to the eligible program of study which were earned prior to enrollment at the postsecondary institution attended under this section; or

(C) Five (5) years have passed since the date of initial enrollment as a Tennessee reconnect grant student, exclusive of any approved leaves of absence.

(2) Notwithstanding subdivision (f)(1)(A), a student may continue to receive a Tennessee reconnect grant for an associate degree following completion of a certificate that directly leads to the associate degree program.

(3) A student who has an approved medical or personal leave of absence from the eligible postsecondary institution may continue to receive the grant upon resuming the eligible program of study at an eligible postsecondary institution so long as the student continues to meet all applicable eligibility requirements.

(g) A student who receives a Tennessee reconnect grant may transfer from one eligible postsecondary institution to another eligible postsecondary institution without loss of the grant so long as the student continues to meet all eligibility requirements for the grant.

(h) Subject to the amounts appropriated by the general assembly, the amount of a Tennessee reconnect grant shall not exceed the cost of tuition and mandatory fees charged to all students for coursework leading to completion of the eligible program of study at the eligible postsecondary institution attended less all other gift aid, which shall be credited first to tuition and mandatory fees.

(i) This section shall apply beginning with the fall semester of 2018 for independent students who enroll in an eligible postsecondary institution.

(j) The comptroller of the treasury, through the comptroller's office of research and education accountability, shall review and study the Tennessee reconnect grant program to determine the effectiveness of the program. The study shall be done in the third year of the program and every four (4) years thereafter. The office of research and education accountability shall report its findings and conclusions to the speakers of the senate and house of representatives and the education committees of the senate and house of representatives by December 31 each year a report is prepared.

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-902(27), is amended by deleting the subdivision and substituting instead the following language:

(27) "Nontraditional student" means a student who is at least twenty-five (25) years of age and who enrolls in a public four-year postsecondary institution or an eligible independent postsecondary institution:

(A) As an entering freshman; or

(B) At least two (2) years after last attending any postsecondary institution;

SECTION 3. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-914(c), is amended by deleting the subsection in its entirety and substituting instead the following language:

Subject to the amounts appropriated by the general assembly and any provision of law relating to a shortfall in funds available for postsecondary financial assistance from the net proceeds of the state lottery, a Tennessee HOPE scholarship awarded to a student attending an eligible two-year postsecondary institution or a nontraditional student attending an eligible independent two-year postsecondary institution shall be one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500) for full-time attendance for each semester. This award amount shall apply to the initial entering freshman class beginning in the fall term of 2015 and to each entering class thereafter.

SECTION 4. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-927(b), is amended by deleting subdivisions (3) and (4) and renumbering the remaining subdivisions accordingly.

SECTION 5. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-927(d)(2), is amended by deleting the subdivision and substituting instead the following language:

Maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0 as determined by the institution attended;

SECTION 6. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-927(d)(5), is amended by deleting the language "nine (9)" wherever it appears and substituting instead the language "six (6)".

SECTION 7. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-927(k), is amended by deleting the subsection and substituting instead the following language:

(k)

(1) Funds appropriated for community college reconnect grants during the 2016-2017 academic year shall be carried forward to the 2017-2018 academic year for the purpose of awarding additional grants. At the end of the 2017-2018 academic year, all funds distributed under this section which remain

unexpended by the community colleges shall revert to the lottery for education account.

(2) A student who remains enrolled in and eligible for the community college reconnect grant program at the end of the 2017-2018 academic year shall be eligible for the Tennessee reconnect grant program for the fall semester of 2018 so long as the student meets all eligibility requirements relative to the Tennessee reconnect grant program.

SECTION 8. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 49-4-931(a)(4), is amended by deleting the subdivision in its entirety and substituting instead the following language:

Attend a public four-year postsecondary institution or an eligible independent postsecondary institution and attempt at least twelve (12) semester hours;

SECTION 9. TSAC is authorized to promulgate rules to effectuate the purposes of this act, including the determination of student eligibility, leaves of absences, and the distribution of funds appropriated for grants under the program. All such rules shall be promulgated in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act compiled in title 4, chapter 5.

SECTION 10. Sections 5, 6, 7, and 9 of this act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it. All other sections of this act shall take effect August 1, 2018, the public welfare requiring it.